



World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh

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“As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people...We are in Afghanistan to confront a common enemy that threatens the United States, our friends and allies, and the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan who have suffered the most at the hands of violent extremists. So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future...To achieve our goals, we need a stronger, smarter and comprehensive strategy.”

- President Barack Obama
March 27, 2009

The Situation:

President Obama has stated that the new administration will treat Afghanistan and Pakistan as two countries with one common challenge – defeating al Qaeda and destroying its safe havens. There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed, however, before the Administration can hope to meet this objective and bring stability to the region.

Your goal as top advisor to President Obama is to advise him on the best way forward in promoting the promise of lasting peace, security, and development in the region.

Background:

Political stability is vital to the region’s ability to combat al-Qaeda threats, and the U.S. hopes to continue engaging with the governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to promote this stability. President Obama has expressed interest in expanding regional diplomacy to all key players in the conflict, while engaging both Afghanistan and Pakistan in a new, trilateral framework at the highest levels.

This framework would enhance intelligence sharing and military cooperation along Pakistan and Afghanistan’s shared border, and address common issues like trade, energy, and economic development. Cultural differences and the historically contentious relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan – as well as political instability within each country – may serve as potential roadblocks to any success this framework might promise.

Relations between the two countries have often been strained, characterized by recurrent mutual suspicion and efforts to interfere in each other’s business, including attempts at destabilization. Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of perpetuating terrorism by arming terrorists, and Pakistan has accused Afghanistan of working with India to conspire against Pakistan. A major point of contention between the two nations is the border region that splits the Pashtun ethnic group between Afghanistan and Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Afghanistan refuses to recognize this boundary.



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FOREIGN POLICY SCENARIO

Pakistan and Afghanistan: New Strategies

The FATA have evolved over time, becoming more independent of Pakistan's government. At this point, the FATA and the bordering Swat Valley present the biggest threat to the United States' plan for stability in the region. The Taliban has built up a power base there as a result of the Pakistani government's loosening grip on the FATA. Pashtun groups continue to provide safe havens and infrastructure for al-Qaeda in the FATA, and opponents have had little success penetrating the network. Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability makes the entire international community uneasy with the idea of al-Qaeda wielding influence inside Pakistan.

Political instability within both countries is a source of concern as well. Assuming he wins his bid for re-election in August 2009, Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan, faces an ailing economy in a country struggling to rebuild itself, as well as continued fighting with Taliban forces inside its borders. And as poppy eradication campaigns cut off a major source of income – with no evident replacement in sight – it is clear that leading the country out of a serious economic struggle will be difficult for President Karzai.

Pakistan has its share of worries as well, with a failing economy of its own and continuing political crises, highlighted by the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007. Such violence has created a certain amount of fragility at the political and institutional level, and has given more power to military interests. The new president, Asif Zardari – Bhutto's husband – has struggled with this push for power and has seen his popularity decrease as the country suffers economically.

Many in Pakistan believe that the United States' involvement in Afghanistan has destabilized the region, presenting a security threat to Pakistan. Many also consider the United States an "unreliable ally" that only aligns itself with Pakistan when it is strategically desirable, and will abandon Pakistan in favor of India whenever necessary.

The Questions: *As top advisor to President Obama on this issue, the President will use your input to propose both a security and development strategy for the region. When approaching the issue, it may be constructive to consider the following:*

1. Given the lessons of Iraq, how can President Obama support stable governance and security in both countries, while using minimal amounts of troops and financial resources which Congress may be reluctant to authorize?
2. Since drug production and trade is such a prominent part of Afghanistan's economy, what can the U.S. do to encourage economic progress while continuing efforts to change the economy structurally? Likewise, what steps can be made to improve prosperity in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas?
3. How should discussions and meetings proceed? What ethnicities, ideologies, and parties should be represented? Should international organizations or other countries be involved? What is the most effective way to engage and include India, given its regional clout, without alienating Pakistan?
4. The Bush Administration explicitly stated that those who harbored terrorists would be considered and treated as terrorists themselves. Would you continue this policy as it applies to Afghanistan and Pakistan?

